

## Abraham – A Model of Faith Development

Last week we looked at the broad sweep of God's eternal purpose for humanity, which commenced in the mind of God when he determined to create a habitable environment in which he could place his image-bearing human creatures, which would allow them, to not only survive, but learn how to thrive and be partners with God in his global mission of transformation.

Incorporated into his eternal purpose was factored in the need to provide a Saviour/Messiah for his covenant people who would come through Abraham, and would eventually embrace every ethnic group and all the individuals of those ethnic groups who would willingly surrender to his invitation to partner with him through a faith that he would provide.

This gives us the perfect introduction to Abraham's faith journey because this is point where Abraham appears in the unfolding of God's eternal purpose. The Apostle Paul refers to Abraham as the "father of the faithful" in Rom 4:16, because of the unfolding story of his faith in God, and his role as the head of the covenant line of Israel. In fact, Abraham is a significant figure in each of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and his story has inspired many people in many different ways.

His story is a genuinely fascinating one, and worthy of us spending quite a number of weeks unpacking and learning from for our own encouragement and inspiration, since we are all on this same journey. It starts with Abraham, who was called Abram at that time, living with his father Terah and their larger family in Ur of Chaldea:

*<sup>31</sup> Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Harran, they settled there.*

*<sup>32</sup> Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Harran. (read only)*

Gen 11:31-32

Now, on the basis of this account, it sounds as though Terah had made the decision to take his family on a road trip to Canaan, but as we go further into the story, we begin to realise there may have been a bit more going on in the background of this situation, so let's read on, and compare some other Scripture references that we also have access to.

*The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. <sup>2</sup> "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."<sup>4</sup> So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. <sup>5</sup> He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they*

*had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.*

Gen 12:1-5

We are given a clearer picture of the back-story that helps to give further context to what was to become both a massive geographical shift, and also, a total life-purpose shift for Abraham and his entire family entourage.

Stephen's response to the Jewish governing body, the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, gives some clarity in Acts 7:1-4:

*Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?" <sup>2</sup> To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia before he lived in Harran. <sup>3</sup> 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.' <sup>4</sup> "So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. (Read only) Acts 7:1-4*

What quickly becomes evident is the break in the Genesis account between God's encounter with Abraham in Ur, and Abraham's decision to leave Harran, which Stephen is able to fill in for us. Clearly, the accepted Jewish understanding of the sequence of events was that God first spoke to Abraham while he was still in Ur but he wasn't able to act on it for himself until Terah had passed away well after they had reached Harran.

Let's see if we can piece this puzzle together. I would suggest that it took Abraham some time to digest his dramatic encounter with Yahweh, remembering that he was an idol worshipper, probably of Nanna the moon god, for whom a massive ziggurat had been built in Ur. As such, he clearly would have had absolutely no prior knowledge of Yahweh, the sovereign creator of the universe, before his personal encounter with him.

Once he had sorted through his own responses to his dramatic life-changing encounter, he probably concluded that he needed to share this experience with his father, Terah. Now we need to keep in mind that this was a very patriarchal society, so Abraham was bound by both social and family tradition, to seek his father's wisdom and blessing on this astounding information that God had spoken to him.

When Terah heard Abraham's story and the obvious impact it must have had on Abraham, Terah automatically slipped into his 'patriarch mode' and began to make plans to facilitate the necessary family response to Abraham's insistence that God had spoken to him.

In a sense, Abraham has submitted his revelation to his father, since that was the custom at that time in that society, so now it is a family decision, and Terah, as the head of the home, led the family from Ur up to Harran, where they stopped and camped for quite a period of time.

Let's get a visual image of the trip they have been undertaking!!!

Harran is about 1000kms further up the Euphrates River from Ur, but here they got distracted - they settled!!!



They settled there – it basically means to sit – in other words, they became inactive!!!!

And interestingly, Harran means 'crossroads' – they were presented with options – choices!!! Terah chose not to proceed – we do have choices!!!

Again, we must remember, that God had spoken to Abraham, not to Terah. Terah did not have faith for this journey but probably felt obligated to support his son. He may have even felt that Abraham was a bit deluded, just like Jesus' family thought he was!!!

I would also suggest that this situation sums up where Chelsea Community Church had come to up until a number of months ago; and we now find ourselves at a crossroads:

- some had settled - become inactive!!!
- others are hurting and anxious, unsure about what to do; and
- others are just simply overworked!!!

These issues are what the Transition Team has been diving into over the past six months, and what we will continue to ponder. We started with exploring our history as a congregation, and through that process, we began to understand how, where, and why we were diverted from our primary purpose, and find ourselves now at this crossroads where we need wisdom from God to know how and where to move forward.